Parent and Family Engagement in Nevada

Understanding Nevada's context at the local, state, and national levels;
Identifying best practices for Nevada's parent and family engagement leaders

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DRAFT FINAL

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Executive Summary

Research repeatedly shows that children whose families and parents are engaged in the education process are more likely to earn better grades, have higher school attendance and graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education. Indeed, the promises of parent and family engagement are great. But as departments, districts and schools embrace these notions, many initiatives may be better characterized as "random acts of family engagement[1]" than as thoughtful, capacity-building programs.

One common challenge - and opportunity - lies simply in defining "engagement." Successful programs identify engagement as a true *partnership* and *shared responsibility* between families, schools and communities, not simply notification or an occasional parent-teacher conference. They are collaborative, interactive, relational and developmental; they aim to build capacity in families, schools, districts and communities as a whole.

States have taken a varied approach to formally recognizing family engagement as a component of education. Comparatively, Nevada's Office of Parent Involvement and Family Engagement (PIFE) and the associated PIFE Advisory Council represent a meaningful step towards creating a more purpose-driven, cohesive strategy for engaging parents and families in Nevada. But more can be done.

The State of Nevada should expand block grant funding for family and community engagement at schools with at-risk populations as well as seek out alternative funding sources from philanthropic foundations. Laws currently under consideration by the Nevada Legislature -

[1]Gill Kressley,K. 2008. Breaking new ground: Seeding proven practices into proven programs. Paper presented August 1, 2008 at the National PIRC Conference, Baltimore, MD.

such as the "Victory School" grants defined in Senate Bill 432 or the expansion of funding for English language learner "Zoom Schools" created by Governor Sandoval in 2011 - provide significant opportunities for schools to engage communities in defining educational and societal needs, and allocate funding to implement actions to address those needs. The state, districts, or individual schools can set up grant tracking systems and sign up for email lists that tell potential grantees when philanthropic funding opportunities arise. Enhanced funding opportunities for family engagement strategies in at-risk schools represents a meaningful step forward for family engagement policy in Nevada, one that is in line with latest national trends and evidence-based practices.

Similarly, schools and school districts in Nevada would be well served to expand efforts to engage the broader community through community-based organizations (CBOs). CBOs have the capacity to "reweave the fabric of urban communities by linking residents together and developing their capacity to work with experts to be change agents for their neighborhoods.[2]" The Nevada PIFE Council should seek to identify CBOs that schools and school districts can partner with to help support family and community engagement in neighborhoods, cities and counties across the state.

Nevada's high percentage of English Language Learner students also suggests that adult literacy programs - shown to be effective for increasing family engagement and student achievement - may be beneficial for community and family capacity-building. These programs can aid and supplement the abilities for parents and families to participate in the education process more directly by assisting students with homework, discussing educational goals and

[2] Warren, 2009, p. 2214

aspirations, and generally promoting a positive view of education. Schools should also work to engage non-English-speaking families. Some strategies to build relationships with these families include making translators available at school events and tracking families' preferred language, as well as providing transportation to and from school events.

Technology can also be a useful tool for engaging families, although practitioners would be wise to view technology as one tool, not a panacea. Recommendations for engaging families with technology include posting regular updates on websites, ensuring that electronic resources are bi- or multilingual, and, importantly, using technology as a means to engage parents as partners in a two-way conversation, not simply a bulletin board or document repository. Schools should also consider "no-tech" approaches, such as greeting parents in the morning to build relationships, sending home flyers advising parents of staff's availability, hosting barbecues and ice cream socials, conducting home visits when needed, and asking for parent feedback.

In addition to recommendations for action, we also find that Nevada would be wise to avoid common pitfalls including choosing the wrong student group, ignoring the community context, and too narrowly evaluating "success." All of these pitfalls point to a trend in academia wherein student achievement - via standardized test scores - become an all-consuming focus. Effective parent and family engagement strategies are shown to have positive effects not only on attitudes, grades and graduation, but also can be seen as a means to develop social capital in communities and across multiple generations.

Issue Statement & Project Purpose

Research covering more than fifty years of practice consistently and positively links parent involvement and family engagement to student achievement (e.g. Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Dearing, Kreider & Weiss, 2008; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2012, *et al*). The State of Nevada has embraced parent involvement and family engagement, but the growing program faces significant challenges - and opportunities - as more structured state family engagement policies are designed and implemented.

This project examines the academic literature and national practices related to parent and family engagement in public schools in order to provide insight for the Nevada Department of Education's Office of Parent Involvement and Family Engagement (PIFE) and the associated PIFE Advisory Council as they help guide the State's efforts. Our work helps provide perspective on how Nevada's PIFE efforts compare to other states and identifies broad "smart" practices and recommendations that Nevada's education leaders may wish to consider when crafting PIFE policies and initiatives.

Context

Defining Parent Involvement and Family Engagement

Nomenclature surrounding parent involvement and family engagement has undergone a significant evolution over the past twenty years. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1995) defined parent involvement as the devotion of resources by a parent to their child from a cognitive-intellectual perspective (e.g. discussing current events), personal involvement perspective (e.g. staying informed about the child's activities at school), and in the school

environment itself (e.g. attending parent-teacher meetings). Parent involvement today, however, is seen by some as indicative of past conceptualizations of the relationship between parents, students and schools, that is, parents who are seen as deficient should participate in school-defined activities that are thought to encourage involvement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). This understanding can lead to a focus on what parents accomplish (i.e. number of PTA meetings attended, initialing student homework) rather than focusing on the programmatic and foundational, even societal root causes that affect entire schools and school districts (Halgunseth & Peterson, 2009).

Today, the term "engagement" is seen by practitioners as a more encompassing term than involvement, resonating with research findings and best practices that view the role between parent, school and community as a two-way relationship. Weiss and Lopez (2009) define family engagement as a "systemic approach to education, from birth to young adulthood," (pg. 1) emphasizing that family engagement is a shared responsibility between families, schools and communities. They also find that effective engagement is continuous across a child's development, thus requiring evolution of parent, school and community roles as children similarly mature. Finally, they note that true engagement should occur across settings including at home, in school, after school, and in the community abroad.

Nevada's Education System

Unfortunately, Nevada is regularly ranked at the bottom of national education reports. Education Week's Research Center (2015) gave Nevada a "D" grade, ranking the state 51st in "chance for success" (early foundations, school years and adult outcomes), 47th in in school finance (equity and spending), and 36th for K-12 achievement (status, change, and equity).

That same report found that Nevada was last or nearly last among the states for the following categories: parents with a postsecondary degree (33.8%), children whose parents are fluent English-speakers, three- and four-year-olds enrolled in preschool (31.4%), high school graduation, postsecondary participation, adult educational attainment, and adults working full time and year-round (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Meanwhile, Governor Sandoval has proposed significant reforms and budget enhancements for education in Nevada. Generally, education is the leading topic of the ongoing legislative session.

Despite these challenges, the Nevada Department of Education is at an exciting inflection point; the Nevada Legislature is presently considering significant reforms and enhanced funding measures proposed by Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval. Governor Sandoval has proposed spending $882 million on enhancements and structural reforms within the state educational system. He has called for a number of educational reforms which have ties to family engagement, including increased funding for English language learning programs, literacy programs, and at-risk schools, as well as the creation of Victory Schools and an Achievement School District, which are both discussed later in this document (Sandoval, 2015).

> "We must draw a line in the sand and say '**No more.**'"
> -Governor Brian Sandoval
> State of the State, January 15, 2015

Nevada Department of Education

The Nevada Legislature officially created the Nevada Department of Education in 1956. Today, the Department is tasked with implementing the policies of the State Board of Education, administering state and federal education programs, and providing technical

assistance to local school districts and schools. The Department and Board have jointly agreed to a vision, "All Nevadans ready for success in the 21st Century" and the mission, "To improve student achievement and educator effectiveness by ensuring opportunities, facilitating learning and promoting excellence" (Nevada Department of Education, 2015). The Department has traditionally played a policy, support, and oversight role with local school districts driving implementation. Recent initiatives undertaken by the Governor, State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Nevada Legislature have enhanced the role that the Department and the Superintendent play at the local and school level.

School Districts

The Nevada Legislature has long held that "public education in the State of Nevada is essentially a matter for local control by local school districts" (NRS 385.005). Nevada's seventeen school districts are conterminous with the boundaries of the counties of the state. Clark County School District is the state's largest – approximately 310,000 students attend – and is the sixth largest in the United States. Nevada's smallest district, Esmeralda County School District, has just 70 students.

PIFE Office

The Department of Education has recently hired a new individual to staff the relatively recently established Office of Parent Involvement and Family Engagement. The Office was established by Assembly Bill 224 of the 2011 Nevada Legislature which also expanded the role of the and Advisory Council on Parental Involvement - originally created in 2007 by Senate Bill 143 - to include "Family Engagement" as part of the Council's scope (Nevada Revised Statute 385.610). Today, the Parent Involvement and Family Engagement (PIFE) Advisory Council has a

statutory duty to review parental engagement policies across the United States and determine if such policies are applicable to the school districts within the State of Nevada. Based on the recommendations of PIFE, the State Board of Education determines subsequent official policy within the state. PIFE is charged with the following duties:

1. Review the policy of parental involvement adopted by the State Board and the policy of parental involvement adopted by the board of trustees of each school district;
2. Review the information relating to communication with and participation of parents that is included in the annual report of accountability for each school district;
3. Review any effective practices carried out in individual school districts to increase parental involvement and determine the feasibility of carrying out those practices on a statewide basis;
4. Review any effective practices carried out in other states to increase parental involvement and determine the feasibility of carrying out those practices in this State;
5. Identify methods to communicate effectively and provide outreach to parents and legal guardians of pupils who have limited time to become involved in the education of their children;
6. Identify the manner in which the level of parental involvement affects the performance, attendance and discipline of pupils;
7. Identify methods to communicate effectively with and provide outreach to parents and legal guardians of pupils who are limited English proficient;
8. Determine the necessity for the appointment of a statewide parental involvement coordinator or a parental involvement coordinator in each school district, or both;
9. On or before July 1 of each year, submit a report to the Legislative Committee on Education describing the activities of the Advisory Council and any recommendations for legislation; and,
10. On or before February 1 of each odd-numbered year, submit a report to the Director of the Legislative Counsel Bureau for transmission to the next regular session of the Legislature describing the activities of the Advisory Council and any recommendations for legislation.

The PIFE Council is comprised of ten voting members (NRS 385.610). A brief profile of the current Council members can be found in Appendix A.

Nevada Education Demographics

For the 2013-2014 school year, total student enrollment in Nevada was 451,730 students in the K-12 system. The state has approximately 21,131 teachers, 683 schools, and a pupil to teacher ratio of 20.80 (5th highest in the nation, the national average is 15.96) (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). Nevada's school system is divided into seventeen school districts and contains one of the largest school districts in the nation, the Clark County School District with approximately 310,000 students, as well as one of the smallest school districts, the Esmeralda County School district with about 70 students (Applied Analysis 2012, National Center for Education Statistics 2011).

With an average of 674.4 students per school, Nevada has the **second highest** average number of students per school behind only Georgia (Applied Analysis 2012).

Nevada faces unique challenges in implementing changes to the school system due the diversity of its student body.

Native American	1.06%
Asian	5.59%
Hispanic	40.56%
African American	9.92%
Caucasian	35.98%
Pacific Islander	1.33%
Mixed Race	5.5%
Free or Reduced Lunch	54.7%

Sources: Nevada Department of Education 2014, Department of Agriculture 2013

The children of low-income immigrant families are more likely to struggle in education systems (McWayne, 2014). Some of the challenges for low-income families include, "time restraints, atypical work schedules, heavy family responsibilities, childcare and transportation problems, and, often, barriers of minority ethnicity, color, and language" (Lott, 2001, p. 254). These families are also at a greater risk of stressors such as a lack of safe physical environments, greater chance of illness and absenteeism, and a greater risk of transience (Lawson, 2012).

More than 1 in 7 students in the State of Nevada are English Language Learners (Applied Analysis, 2012) and the state faces the unique challenge of educating students from rural, migrant worker environments as well as more urban metropolises (Avila, 2015).

Victory Schools

One of Governor Sandoval's initiatives is to identify "Victory Schools." Senate Bill 432, currently under consideration in the 78th Regular Session of the Nevada Legislature, provides for the designation of Victory Schools. The bill establishes a categorical funding program for schools in the most impoverished areas of the state. Two factors determine eligibility for Victory School funding, 1) poverty levels as determined by the U.S. Census, and 2) low levels of pupil achievement and school performance as measured by the statewide system of accountability (Senate Bill 432, 2015).

Functionally, seventeen zip codes in five counties (Clark, Nye, Humboldt, Elko and Washoe) qualify to receive Victory School funding under the current pilot program (Erquiaga, 2015). These areas present some of the unique challenges that Nevada educators face because of the state's diversity. In some areas, these communities face inner-city poverty, while other areas are rural, including several Native American populations. Currently, approximately 35 schools - 26 elementary schools, 5 middle schools and 4 high schools - have been identified for this initial phase of the program. (Testimony to the Nevada Senate Committee on Education, Erquiaga, 3/26/15)

Victory Schools must also present a plan to the State Department of Education, which must include a needs assessment for pupils, including consultation from the community in order to identify challenges as well as engage the community in improving education

performance in the school (Senate Bill 432, 2015). The plan must also identify means to determine effectiveness, consider available funding for the school, and coordinate with other regional service offerers (faith-based organizations, “wrap-around” services, etc.). Victory Schools may use funding to:

- Provide free pre-kindergarten programs
- Expand full-day kindergarten classes
- Provide for instructional programs when school is not in session (e.g. Summer)
- Provide for instructional programs before or after the traditional school day
- Provide professional development for teachers and other education personnel
- Recruit and retain highly effective teachers and education personnel
- Provide evidence-based social, psychological or health care services to pupils and their families, including without limitation, wrap-around services
- Provide programs and services designed to engage parents and families
- Provide programs to improve school climate and culture
- Provide evidence-based programs and services designed to meet the specific needs of pupils as identified by the assessment conducted by the school (Senate Bill 432, 2015)

The Governor proposes to provide a total of $50 million to these Victory Schools through a grant program administered by the Nevada Department of Education (Education Fact Sheet). The following table identifies the demographic profiles of the five counties with Victory Schools as they compare to statewide student demographic statistics in the 2013-2014 school year.

Name	Total Enrollment	American Indian / Alaskan Native %	Asian %	Hispanic %	Black %	White %	Pacific Islander %	Two or More Races %
State	451,730	1.06	5.59	40.56	9.92	35.98	1.33	5.57
Clark	314,636	0.47	6.56	44.4	12.41	28.62	1.51	6.03
Elko	9,945	6.07	0.74	30.27	0.96	61	0.44	0.52
Humboldt	3,517	4.01	0.85	36.05	0.34	55.87	-	2.64
Nye	5,171	1.86	1.35	24.39	3.5	66.08	1.24	1.59
Washoe	62986	1.61	4.39	38.87	2.41	46.37	0.99	5.37

(Nevada Report Card, 2015)

Name	Male %	Female %	Special Education %	English Language Learners %	Free & Reduced Lunch %
State	51.53	48.47	11.5	15.02	52.95
Clark	51.56	48.44	11.15	16.51	56.79
Elko	51.49	48.51	10.77	11.19	35.77
Humboldt	51.75	48.25	14.02	12	38.44
Nye	51.96	48.04	15.47	7.25	61.34
Washoe	51.91	48.09	13.45	15.92	47.73

(Nevada Report Card, 2015)

Achievement School District

Similar to the Victory Schools Program, the Governor proposes to establish an "Achievement School District" in the state. It will consist of the state's 78 schools in the lowest 10 percent of achievement scores (Underperforming Schools Fact Sheet, 2015). The district will not be dependent upon geography, unlike the current structure of Nevada school districts. Instead, these schools will be led at a state level (Governing, 2015). In addition to creating the Achievement School District, the Governor proposes to allocate $5 million in grants to chronically underperforming schools that are at risk of being taken over in an attempt to preempt their being placed in the Achievement School District (Education Fact Sheet, 2015).

American Indian Students

The State of Nevada is home to twenty-one federally recognized Indian tribes (National Conference of State Legislatures) and has 32 American Indian reservations and colonies (Nevada Indian Territory Map). According to the Census Bureau, 1.6 percent of Nevada's population identifies as American Indian or Alaskan Native, which is greater than the national average of 1.2 percent. Assembly Bill 266 (1997) created an Education Programs Professional position which allowed for the Nevada Department of Education to hire a consultant for Indian

Education (Nevada Department of Education Indian Education). The position was established to collaborate with tribes and to monitor the achievement levels of American Indian students.

English Language Learners

One of the three focus areas for the Governor's Achievement School District is regarding children who are English language learners (Underperforming Schools Fact Sheet, 2015). Twenty-nine percent of Nevadans speak a language other than English at home. Nevada also has the highest density of English language learners in the nation (Horsford, Mokhtar, and Sampson, 2013, p. 4). As mentioned above, Zoom Schools focus on elementary schools with high numbers of English language learner students. The Zoom Schools offer training for school staff, intensive learning for students, and parent and family outreach (Zoom Schools: Clark and Washoe County Zoom Schools Summaries, 2014). Also, the Governor's 2015 proposed budget expands the Zoom Schools Program by allocating $25 million per year to double the number of schools served in Clark and Washoe Counties, including middle and high schools.

Fiscal Overview

According to testimony on March 26, 2015 from Nevada Superintendent Dale A.R. Erquiaga to the Nevada Senate Committee on Education, the Nevada Legislature created the Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding to review The Nevada Plan for School Finance, originally adopted in 1967. The Plan established a formula to assign per-pupil expenditures equalized based on district-wide characteristics, but does not have student weights or multipliers for different types of students, aside from Special Education students. The Task Force identified a need for supplemental funding for at risk students who were identified based

on free and reduced-price lunch qualification. The Task Force also recommended expanding categorical grants for different types of student groups. (Erquiaga, 2015)

Many programs that are designed to further parental engagement, such as after school programs or informational websites, are funded through Federal Title I funds that are provided by the U.S. Department of Education (Ferguson, 2009). In order to understand the role Title I plays, it is first necessary to have a basic overview of the program.

The Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established federal funding for local education agencies (LEAs) in order to help schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families meet academic performance standards. The federal funds come with a four levels of requirements that must be met by each state's local education agency in order to receive higher amounts of funds:

1. Basic grants provide funding to schools if the percentage of students that are identified as low-income exceeds 2% of the population.
2. Concentration grants are awarded if a school's population exceeds 6,500 total students and 15% or more of the students are identified as low-income.
3. Targeted grants use the levels identified from the Basic and Concentration grants, but provide further funding if an additional 5% of the population on a data weighted basis.
4. Education finance Incentive grants award additional funds based on the level of a state's financial input relative to the state's per capita income and the distribution of funds by the state.

Title I funds are typically used to fund academic support programs, like those focused on low-achieving students and English language learners. Preschool, after-school programs, and summer programs are also often funded through Title I funds as long as the programs are school wide. (U.S. Department of Education Laws and Guidance section, 2014).

A major part of Title I's program was implemented in 2001 under the No Child Left Behind Act (Ferguson 2009). Under NCLB, four guiding principles were established to improve parental engagement:

1. Accountability for results.
2. Local control and flexibility.
3. Expanded parental choice.
4. Effective and successful programs that reflect scientifically based research.

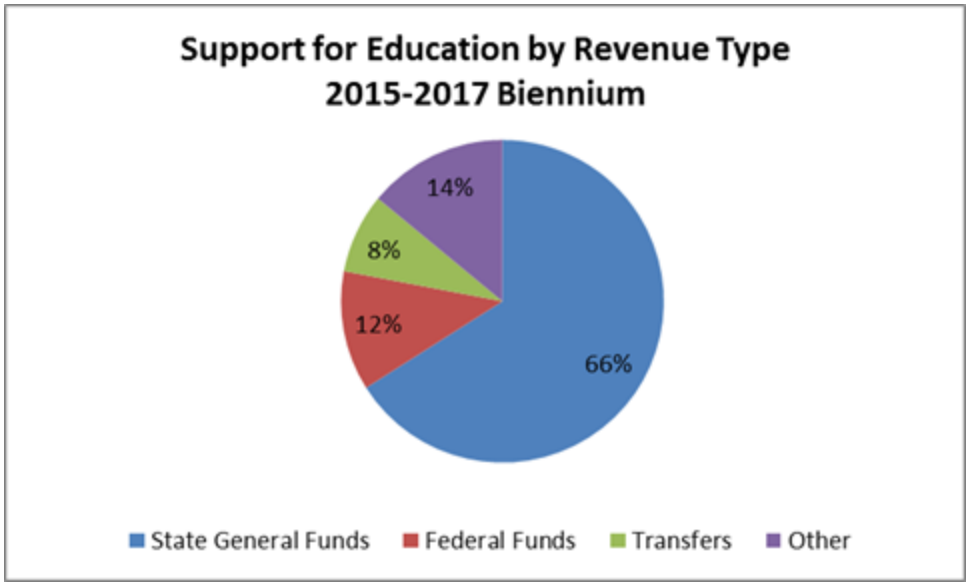
Fortunately, the specific guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education are fairly relaxed and only list two general recommendations to meet the above requirements (Ferguson 2009):

1. That local districts and schools develop programs to foster parental involvement.
2. Local districts and schools develop these programs in consultation with parents.

It should also be noted that there are many specific requirements contained within Title I, such as mandatory parent teacher conferences to be held annually at minimum, by which schools already abide (U.S. Department of Education 2014). These pre-existing systems should be kept in mind when recommending policies since they can act as starting points for future improvements in parental engagement.

State of Nevada Budget Overview

The total budget for the State of Nevada is approximately $9 billion for the Current Biennium Fiscal Years 2014-2015.



Funding

66% General Fund
14% Other
12% Federal Fund
8% Transfers
Total 2015-2017: $ 1,896,962,198

According to the Governor's recommended budget, a significant area of education spending is on the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) where funding of $1,299,486,510 in 2014 and $1,358,803,709 has been allocated in the budget. The LEAs provide direct state financial aid to school districts and charter schools for K-12 public education in Nevada and ensure funding for delivery of K-12 education services.

Budget Item: 2706 Parental Involvement and Family Engagement

For Budget Years 2015-2016 Total Revenue Identified: $398,801 and Total Expenditures, including the funding of 2.0 Full Time Positions: $398,801. Future years have been budgeted at around $400,000.

Grant Opportunities: Philanthropic Foundations

Funding opportunities exist with several national foundations that focus on education and family engagement programs. In 2014, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation announced grants totaling $13.7 million to nonprofit organizations dealing specifically with family engagement programs (W.K. Kellogg). Thirty organizations that received those funds are in the process of developing and implementing family engagement programs across the nation (2014 W.K. Kellogg). Typically, foundations have a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, where grant seeking entities may apply for available project grants.

The following are two online resources to help identify funding opportunities:

- *The Philanthropy News Digest* publishes requests for proposals and notices of awards as a free service.
- *Foundation Directory Online* is a free search engine that allows three levels of research with a subscription. This directory currently lists 631 grantmakers for the State of Nevada alone.

Additional Examples of Funding Available from Foundations:

- The Ceres Foundation offers funding for family strengthening programs that help disadvantaged parents to overcome obstacles to forming families, to keep their families together, and to break the cycle of abuse.
- The Western Union Foundation funds efforts to help empower migrant families and alleviate poverty. The Western Union Foundation supports philanthropic initiatives worldwide. Among the foundation's three primary focus areas is Creating Pathways to Opportunity - programs that allow individuals to have better access to educational opportunities and economic development programs.

PIFE may choose to partner with nonprofit organizations if philanthropic grant requirements prohibit a governmental entity from applying. It is important to think strategically

and devise a multi-pronged approach to be able to access all available funding for parental engagement initiatives.

Other State Experiences

Below is a description of states that received funding for family engagement projects. Several states have partnered with large philanthropic foundations and nonprofit organizations to take advantage of available funding earmarked for family engagement activities.

- **W. K. Kellogg Foundation**- Alabama- 2 year initiative $500,000. The WKKF has an explicit commitment to family engagement — which the foundation defines as a shared responsibility between families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement. Alabama has taken advantage of available funding and is in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of their multi-year project.
- **Heising-Simons Foundation** California Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project. It has been noted that home visits provide a positive opportunity to meet federal and state mandates that families be meaningfully informed of their child's academic standing.This model began in Sacramento, California, but has since been adopted and adapted by schools and districts in seventeen other states.

Federal Funding Opportunities

In addition to federally earmarked Title 1 funds, many times the federal Department of Education provides funding opportunities outside of the existing stream of funding. Funds may be available for a limited duration, such as a five-year grant, and are often tied to specific project requirements and desired outcomes. An online government search engine found at www.grants.gov can be accessed to identify available funding for family engagement practices. Although there are no current grants listed that the PIFE could apply for at this time, it is recommended that the office monitor the website on a monthly basis.

Findings

Researchable Questions

- What are the strategies used by the 50 US states for engaging parents in their children's education?
- In addition to strategies that may be identified through the research process, is federal funding available for NV to begin implementing some of the engagement strategies?
- What is the evidence that these policies are effective?
- Are these policies appropriate and effective for diverse student populations?
- Are these policies applicable to Nevada schools, specifically the VICTORY schools?

State Survey Methodology

This report presents data on the parent engagement practices and program designs deployed by all 50 states. Data driven analysis and fact finding is considered the optimal approach when making policy recommendations. Existing parental engagement programs operated by other states serve as a resource to provide the team generous information and data on program outcomes and impact to parental and child behavior.

The project team surveyed 50 states to conduct in-depth research of existing parental engagement practices, and understand the effectiveness of those strategies. The state's strategies were gathered from various online resources, such as department websites and statutes. The effectiveness was determined from state education statistics available online, as well as from prior research studies. The project team developed standardized criteria in the form of a matrix which is useful when assessing multiple elements of each state's program. This approach mitigates as much variability of the analysis as feasible, since each state may have challenges that are unique to their communities.

Literature Review

Some research has shown that family engagement programs can help solve the challenges faced by low-income or English language learners (McWayne, 2014). As Murray (2009) explains, "supportive relationships with parents may be particularly important for Latino and African American youth living in low-income urban environments" (p. 379). Contrary to predominant stereotypes, low-income parents are deeply concerned with their children's education, but often lack the resources and social capital needed to participate (Lott, 2001). Unlike middle class parents, low-income families often feel that they have less authority to interject in school proceedings (Warren, 2009). Unfortunately, Lott (2001) explains, "what education professionals interpret as disinterest and apathy, low-income parents see as poor communication and discouragement of their efforts to participate in a world in which they have little influence" (p. 254).

Partner with Community-Based Organizations

Even with its particular challenges, Nevada's education system also has several avenues at its disposal to encourage parental engagement. For example, some schools have achieved success through partnerships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) (Lawson, 2012). These organizations can help low-income parents improve their social capital and ease some of the barriers to engagement with their children (Lawson, 2012). CBOs can often tailor their programs to the specific interests of their neighborhoods, and are not impeded by the often-inflexible school procedures and directives (Lawson, 2012). Over

> CBOs have the capacity to "reweave the fabric of urban communities by linking residents together and developing their capacity to work with experts to be change agents for their neighborhoods" (Warren, 2009, p. 2214).

time, many schools have grown distant from their communities, whereas CBO's are well versed in their culture and environment (Warren, 2009). According to Warren et al. (2009), "when CBOs are authentically rooted in community life… they can build relational bridges between educators and parents and act as catalysts for change" (p. 2209). Partnerships with CBO's allow policy makers to shift focus from individual to collective solutions (Warren, 2009).

Warren et al. outline three key strategies that CBOs use to encourage parent involvement: (1) allow parents to build relationships with other parents, build relationships with teachers, (2) foster leadership skills in parents, and (3) serve as an intermediary between educators and parents, who often represent differing cultures and authority positions (2009). In one New Jersey school, a CBO helped rebuild the trust it had lost with its community members. In partnership with the school, the organization ran a clinic and an after-school program, and served as a resource to parents and teachers (Warren, 2009). The school and CBO created a space for parents to learn together (Warren, 2009).

Adult Literacy Programs

Meanwhile, adult literacy programs offer another method to improve parent engagement and student achievement (Lynch, 2009). Researchers have found links between the education level of parents and their children (Lynch, 2009). Adult literacy programs can have a positive influence on the overall health of the family, school participation, and their involvement in community and political activities (Lynch, 2009). Rather than overly scripted, generic curriculum, effective literacy programs use the participant's daily environment to teach them how to improve their reading skills (Lynch, 2009). Effective programs view literacy as a "social practice, which views reading and writing as part of larger historical, social, cultural, and

economic practices that are patterned in society" (Lynch, 2009, p. 509). These program tasks can include reading menus, magazines, children's homework, and school newsletters (Lynch, 2009).

Parent Engagement in the Home

Meanwhile, compared to other forms of parent involvement, students succeed even more when parents help their children with education at home (Back, 2011). Many studies have found that parent engagement in the home benefits students more than parental engagement at school. For example, according to Finn (1998) and others, "the home environment is among the most important influences on academic performance" (p. 20). Regardless of grade level, teacher assistance can help boost parent involvement in homework (Epstein, 1991). In Epstein's study of inner city elementary and middle schools, she found that most parents would devote more time to their child's learning process at home if they received guidance and instructions (1987). Parents who do receive homework instruction rate the teachers higher in "teaching ability and interpersonal skills" (Epstein, 1987, p. 128).

> "If schools had to choose only one policy to stress… the most payoff for the most parents comes from teachers involving parents in helping their children learn at home" (Epstein, 1984, p. 72).

One way for parents to engage with their children at home is through homework. Studies indicate that students achieve higher levels of academic success when parents monitor their homework (Battle-Bailey, 2004). For example, teachers can offer interactive homework, which requires parents to participate in their child's learning process (Battle-Bailey, 2004). The effectiveness of interactive homework can depend on its use of realistic scenarios and

incorporation of the child's home environment (Battle-Bailey, 2004). Effective interactive homework does not involve parent domination, but allows the child to learn with assistance (Battle-Bailey, 2004). In a study of low-income Latino students, children showed higher motivation to read when their parents were involved in their child's reading assignments (Loera, 2011).

With her many years of research experience in parent engagement, Epstein (1987) recommends four key tactics: "clear goals, appropriate materials, transactional communications, and evaluations" (p. 133). Meanwhile administrators ought to distribute relevant research on best practices, provide workshops on how to assist parents, coordinate documentation methods, solicit teamwork and sharing of strategies from teachers, provide incentive programs for teachers, and offer grants to test strategies on small scales (Epstein, 1987).

Additionally, administrators can use the following strategy for bolstering parent involvement efforts at home: (1) gauge current practices, (2) set goals and benchmarks, (3) determine who holds the responsibility for those goals, (4) evaluate the program, and (5) recognize the need for time for the program to grow and develop (1991). Though English and reading teachers more often present opportunities for parent involvement, many of the strategies could work for other course topics (Epstein, 1991).

Many agree on the benefits of parent engagement; however, methods to bolster participation are often more obscure. Regardless of the decided approach, Mapp et al. (2014), with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), warn that "random acts of parent involvement have little effect on student performance" (p. 1). Instead, quality

parental engagement requires that policymakers, together with parents and teachers, craft effective strategies and form collaborative relationships (Mapp, 2014). When these steps are taken, children can thrive.

Technology and Parent Engagement

PIFE could also consider using internet based tools in order to increase parental engagement. A number of states in the U.S. use different web based approaches to engage parents of students, but at the same time other states have little to no internet based resources. It is generally viewed that technology advances, such as the internet, are useful tools that often facilitate efficient communication (Henderson, 2002).

Five Tips for Parent Engagement Websites

1. Schools should use internet based resources to help parents establish home environments that are supportive of learning (Piper, 2012).
2. School websites should be used to regularly communicate with families. Websites must be regularly updated with current information and should use dynamic web feeds, such as RSS feeds, in order to make the website relevant and useful (Piper, 2012). Furthermore, the website should be multilingual in order to make outreach to all parents possible.
3. Parent recruitment for volunteer efforts should be encouraged through the use of a parent dedicated portion of the website (Piper, 2012).
4. The website should have a large number of interactive learning activities for parents to use to enhance their children's education. In addition, teachers should upload relevant teaching materials to the site for easy access.
5. The school's website should be used as means of soliciting feedback from parents in order to make recommendations for changes and programs within the school itself. Surveys can easily be completed online in order to gain feedback from parents (Piper, 2012).

Overview of How States Use Websites for Parent Engagement

The use of websites and internet based across states varies significantly. Some states, such as Oregon, have almost no internet based resources and may offer a few links to Title I requirements on parental engagement (Oregon 2015). Fortunately, many states now have some form of technology based resources to increase parental engagement. The Oklahoma Department of Education has a strong focus on parent involvement and as part of their efforts the department has developed 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Oklahoma 2015). These centers provide students with after-hours access to various learning opportunities such as tutoring, webinars, and mentoring services and targets low income students who might lack access to technological resources such as the internet.

Many states use websites to provide useful information to parents such as the Massachusetts Department of Education, which provides lessons on how to read to children, newsletters, and various parent tutoring guides, all of which are available in a number of different languages. Another common theme of the use of technology to increase parental engagement is encouraging communication between schools and families and soliciting input from parents. The Illinois Department of Education mandates that every school use their website to solicit feedback from parents for Annual Parent Meetings as well as asking parents where funds such be used for Parent Involvement Activities. This strategy is a great way to use the internet, since feedback and communication can be done quickly and effectively.

While the use of internet resources clearly has advantages, it should not be the only source of information for parents. As Cooper and Crosnoe (2007) note, not every parent will be technologically savvy enough to use internet based resources and many families may lack internet access altogether. Therefore, PIFE could approach parental engagement using a two

pronged approach of high-tech and “no tech” outreach in order to ensure all parents are able to participate.

A No-Tech Approach to Parent Engagement

Although technology clearly offers certain advantages in increasing parental engagement there are still traditional, non-technology, based methods of increasing parental engagement. For example, Commodore Elementary-Middle School in Baltimore, Maryland was a troubled school with 95% of students eligible for free lunches, gang and teen pregnancy issues, and a low academic rank of 872 out of 875 schools in the state (Education Digest 2014). However, in the last four years administrators and staffed engaged in a program of parent engagement that has increased student testing scores by 20%, decreased dropout and teen pregnancy rates, and increased parent participation in parent-teacher conferences to 95% (Education Digest 2014). The principal of the school, Marc Martin, attributes the schools success to several simple steps: greeting parents every morning in order to build relationships, sending out flyers to let parents know that staff are always available, holding ice cream socials and barbecues, conducting at home visits for busy parents, and soliciting parent feedback (Education Digest 2014). While the improvement at Commodore School highlights one case and is based on anecdotal evidence, the situation does highlight how simple steps could be implemented through a statewide program to increase parental engagement.

Inclusive Practices for Non-English Speaking Families

Active parental involvement has been shown to increase a child’s grades, educational aspirations, and sense of belonging to a school (Cheung and Pomerantz 2012). This benefit also

extends to the children of recent immigrants, or non-English speaking families (Jeynes 200), but racial, cultural, and socioeconomic factors change the way the children in these families respond to parental engagement (Garcia et al. 2009, Georgis et al 2014). One of the primary obstacles that parents of non-English speaking children face is lack of comfort with the native language (Garcia et al. 2009, Ramirez 2009). In order to address this issue, it is recommended that interpreters be provided at community engagement events in order to alleviate this stress for non-English speaking parents and encourage them to return to future parent involvement events (Garcia et al. 2009). Another socioeconomic obstacle that many immigrant families face is lack of transportation to attend parent events such as back to school night (Turney & Kao 2009). This obstacle can easily be solved if schools are provided resources to provide transportation to and from parent events and again encourage their participation (Turney & Kao 2009). Lastly, parents that are non-English speakers often lack a understanding of the structure and resources of the school that their children attend (Turney & Kao 2009). This problem is easily solved by providing school materials and informational pamphlets in appropriate languages. A database can be established noting the native language of student's parents in order to ensure information is distributed in the appropriate language (Turney & Kao 2009).

Potential Pitfalls to Avoid

Even with the efforts identified above, parent engagement programs sometimes do not show promising results. Parent engagement and academic performance can present a "complex relationship" (Watkins, 1997, p.

In order to produce an effective parent engagement policy or program, careful consideration should be given to decide on the appropriate **age group** of the students, **benchmarks**, **context**, and **methods of inclusion** for all types of parents.

3). As Domina (2005) contends, “the parental involvement activities that are most frequently targeted by schools have little or no direct influence on children’s educational outcomes” (p. 234).

Potential Pitfall: Choosing the Wrong Student Age Group

Although not a typical topic of literature discussion, parent engagement policies should give careful consideration to which age group is most appropriate and helpful. Parent involvement efforts can decrease as children grow older, along with their efficacy (Domina, 2005). Engagement programs that focus efforts on elementary school children are often more successful than those that include middle and high school students (Domina, 2005).

Potential Pitfall: The Evaluation Scope is Too Narrow

Parent engagement efforts often fail to demonstrate positive trends because the evaluations metrics are too narrow. For example, parent engagement programs sometimes neglect to measure the benefits of the program on children’s behavior in addition to their academic performance. Additionally, some efforts include an over-emphasis on test scores as the only measurement of success (Stitt, 2014). Studies have shown that parents are more involved in their child’s education when the child performs poorly. Sometimes the child’s performance influences the degree of involvement (Watkins, 1997). Thus, in order for a program to demonstrate effectiveness, policy designers should use an appropriate breadth of evaluation metrics.

Potential Pitfall: Ignoring the Community Context

Another potential pitfall of parental engagement programs is the tendency to rely on an individualistic approach. Some question the applicability of Epstein’s suggestions for parent

engagement to low income families (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). Her strategy is largely individualistic, whereas others have suggested a community-focused approach. For example, Alameda-Lawson (2014) explains, “parent empowerment can be achieved in low-income school community settings when vulnerable parents work collectively to develop the knowledge, skills, and authority they need to gain control over the barriers and constraints that most affect them” (p. 201). One study of a low income, primarily Latino Title 1 school found a positive relationship between community parent engagement (CPE) and academic achievement (Alameda-Lawson, 2014).

Potential Pitfall: Parents Left Out

Furthermore, some parent engagement programs have been shown to actually leave out significant portions of the parent population. Some of the literature criticizes the tendency of engagement efforts to rely on a “middle class-white definition of what counts as parental support” (Stitt, 2014, p. 75). Some policies also leave out single parents, which does not prove effective (Stitt, 2014). Many schools also fail to tackle the barriers that hinder parents from involvement; like time, resources, and school culture (Stitt, 2014). If a school offers more opportunities to participate, parents with the resources will more likely take advantage of those opportunities, while those without resources are not able to participate (Bardach, 2012). Thus, some researchers recommend implementing alternative parent engagement strategies, instead of the typical parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings. For example, some recommend policies that empower parents to make decisions in the education process (Stitt, 2014). Stitt recommends conceiving of parents as partners rather than accomplices (2014).

Recommendations

Given Nevada's unique education context, below is a concise summary of recommendations for parent engagement:

1. Partner with Community Based Organizations (CBOs).
2. Assign homework that includes parent participation.
3. Provide adult literacy programs.
4. Include efforts to engage non-English speaking families.
5. Include "low-tech" and "no-tech" solutions.
6. Take advantage of available grants, in order to bolster parent engagement programs. Check the federal Department of Education website on a monthly basis for non-routine funding opportunities.

Limitations

The amount of research on any particular aspect of education is vast and often contains controversial ideas. It has been some what difficult for our group to wade through the large amount of information in a meaningful and efficient manner, even when narrowing our topic to parental engagement. Researching best practices in 50 states has led to a compilation of a lot of information; however, we have found that many states have looked to national models

developed by prominent nonprofit or educational organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association. Furthermore, due to the human nature of education, and in particular parental engagement, has come with mixed results, as it may be difficult to discern projects that are effective since results often take years, or even a generation, to fully implement and prove.

There are also several social-economic factors that must must be considered prior to recommending any parental engagement improvements. Nevada is a diverse state with students coming from different ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Particular recommendations may be unfair to certain groups, such as rural students who might lack access to the internet or computers, and therefore careful consideration must be given to match the objectives of the Nevada Department of Education with ability of students and families to engage in such changes. We must also consider parental language and time for engagement barriers. Lastly, there are obvious legal challenges and requirements that must be considered in the implementation of any recommendation. As seen in Appendix A, legal mandates are often complex and require any changes to adhere to current statutes.

Conclusion

The research is definitive: students whose families are actively engaged in the educational process are more likely to succeed across a number of academic and social metrics. In our review of parent and family engagement policies across the United States, we found that Nevada's formal commitment to engaging families puts the State in a class of states who are transitioning from policy focused on *parent involvement*, to a strategy centered around *family engagement*. This move is consistent with best practices and the most recent research and

writing on the topic. Furthermore, we found that education reforms currently being evaluated by the Nevada Legislature are consistent with current trends and research-based practices that encourage collaborative, community and family engagement.

To further propel Nevada toward collaborative family engagement, we suggest that Nevada consider several strategies: partnering with community-based organizations; developing programs that help parents interact with students through homework; providing adult literacy programs; engaging non-English speaking families; leveraging low-tech and no-tech techniques; identifying and helping overcome basic socio-economic barriers; and, seeking alternative funding sources.

Although there is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy for crafting the most effective family engagement policy, it is clear that when true *engagement* occurs - that is, when parents and teachers, schools and communities collaborate as *partners* in the entire education process - students, teachers and communities win.

Appendices

A. Nevada Parental Involvement and Family Engagement Council (2015)

B. Summary of Parent Involvement & Family Engagement Strategies in 50 States

State PIFE Summary DRAFT

General Program Information			Program Review				State & Student Demographic Information				
State	Parental Involvement Link	Contact	Originally Implemented	Description	Criteria	Report(s)	Population	Urbanization	# of Students	% F&R Lunch	%ELL
AK	http://education.alaska.gov/parents.html	Patricia Farren (parent involvement) 907-465-2892	2010	Adopted National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships as the state's model		Family Engagement Plan	737,259	60%	132,104	38.4	11.3
AL	http://education.alaska.gov/parents.html	Policy and Budget Chief of Staff 334-242-9755	As of 2010	Adopted National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships; Sponsored by the Alabama Education Association			4,833,996	58%	730,427	55.1	2.4
AL	http://www.alsde.edu/Pages/home.aspx	Geraldine Mallette, Public School Program Advisor Phone: 501-683-5300		CARE Model- Emphasis on home visits.Sixteen schools from seven school districts are participating in the program.		Family Engagement Plan	4,833,996	58%	730,427	55.1	2.4
AR	http://www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/federal-programs/parental-involvement	Arizona Department of Education Family Engagement Initiative ADE.Inbox@azed.gov, Or Constituent Services 602-542-3710		SEDL Tool Kit		2 year initiative of $500,000.	2,958,765	55%	482,114	60.5	6.6
AZ	http://www.azed.gov/parents/familyengagement/	Questions: Nancy Bodenhausen | nbodenhausen@cde.ca.gov | 916-445-4904	As of 2012	Reference to several national models. Examples include Academic Parent Teacher Teams and National Network of Partnership Schools			6,634,997	88%	1,067,210	45.2	7.5
CA	http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/	Dr. Darcy Hutchins, hutchins_d@cde.state.co.us303-866-5921. State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (SACPIE)		Family Engagement Framework; Framework developed with WestEd. Received funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation. Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project is a partnership between the Sacramento City Teachers Association,			38,431,393	94%	6,169,427	54.1	23.6
CO	http://www.cde.state.co.us/sacpie	SFSP: Judy Carson Telephone: (860) 807-2122 Fax (860) 807-2127		National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Best Practices Framework		http://www.pthvp.org/	5,272,086	83%	842,864	39.9	11.8
CT	http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&q=322552	Delaware State Parent Advisory Council (DSPAC) Theresa Kough,Director, Career, Technical and Title 1 Resources Telephone: (302) 857-3320 Fax: (302) 739-1780		None Specified. Collection of best practices-Appendices A & B			3,599,341	88%	552,919	34.5	5.6
DE	http://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/1110	Bureau of Family and Community Outreach (BFCO) Hope Williams, Program Specialist 650-245-0842		None Specified. Reference to the National Education Association. Title I regulation.			925,240	84%	128,342	48.0	5.6
FL	http://www.fldoe.org/schools/family-community/activities-programs/parental-involvement.stml	Nate Schult Parent Engagement Program Manager nschult@doe.k12.ga.us Phone: 404-463-1956 Fax: 770-344-4528		None Specified. Family & School Partnership Act mandates the state to develop programs. An online 'Just for Parents' community exists.			19,600,311	91%	2,641,555	56.0	8.7
GA	http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/Parent-Engagement-Program.aspx	Nate Schult Parent Engagement Program Manager nschult@doe.k12.ga.us Phone: 404-463-1956 Fax: 770-344-4528		Adopted National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships as the state's model			9,994,759	74%	1,676,419	57.4	4.9
IA	https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/special-education/parent-information/parent-educator-connection-pec#What_We_Do_for_Parents_and_Educators	Deb Samson, 515-242-5295, deb.samson@iowa.gov		Iowa DOE requires districts to follow the Title I parent involvement guidelines, and provides resources and services for parents with special needs, through the Parent-Educator Connect program.			3,092,341	63%	484,856	38.9	4.4

1

APPENDIX A.

Membership of Nevada Parental Involvement and Family Engagement Council (2015)

- **2 teachers in public schools**
  - Jeffrey Hinton (Clark County)
    - 2014 Nevada Teacher of The Year
    - High School American History teacher (13 years)
    - US Marine Corps
  - Jennifer Hoy (Washoe County)
    - 2015 Washoe County School District Teacher of the Year Finalist
    - Middle School English Teacher
- **2 parents or legal guardians of pupils enrolled in public schools**
  - Reverend Kelcey West
    - Director of Minister's Division, Nevada/California Baptist Church Convention, VP of Churches of Southern Las Vegas
  - Stavan Corbett
    - Former President of Nevada State Board of Education
    - Clark County Trustee (Central Las Vegas Valley)
    - Consultant, Educational Law Center
- **1 administrator of a public school**
  - Billiejo Hogan
    - Principal, East Valley Elementary School, Fernley
- **1 representative of private business or industry**
  - Denette Corrales
    - Loan Team Leader, Wells Fargo (Las Vegas)
- **1 school district board of trustees member in a county whose population is less than 100,000**
  - Stacie Wilke
    - Carson City Trustee
    - Executive Officer, Nevada Association of School Boards
- **1 school district board of trustees member in a county whose population is 100,000 or more**
  - Nick Smith
    - Washoe County Trustee
    - General Manager, Sizzler; Sushi restaurant owner
- **1 member of the Legislative Assembly**
  - Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson
    - Assistant Minority Floor Leader
    - Washoe County
    - Masters, Social Work, University of Michigan
- **1 member of the Legislative Senate**
  - Senator Patricia Farley
    - Clark County

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